

Hawaii calls back its own

By Joy Aschenbach

Far out in the Pacific Ocean, "kanaka maoli," descendants of native Hawaiians, have come closer than ever to taking back control of the island lands they say were stolen from them.

"This is the first time people with any amount of Hawaiian blood have been able to participate in and make decisions for themselves. It's quite a monumental event," says Tara Lulani McKenzie, executive director of the Hawaiian Sovereignty Elections Council, created by the state to facilitate a 1995 plebiscite.

About 200,000 native Hawaiians in the state of 1.1 million residents, and 74,000 more on the U.S. mainland, will be eligible to cast a ballot.

Native Hawaiians are those who can trace their ancestors back before 1778, when the first Europeans, led by English Capt. James Cook, reached their islands.

Ballots will be mailed out Nov. 15 and must be returned by Dec. 29. The single yes-no proposition will ask the native people whether they want to elect delegates to a convention that could recommend some form of native Hawaiian government.

The results will be announced Jan. 17, 1996. That will be the 103rd anniversary of the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii by American sugar planters and businessmen, who wanted duty-free trade with the mainland. They were backed by U.S. Marines.

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In November 1993, President Clinton signed a resolution from Congress formally apologizing to native Hawaiians for the 1893 overthrow and acknowledging its illegality.

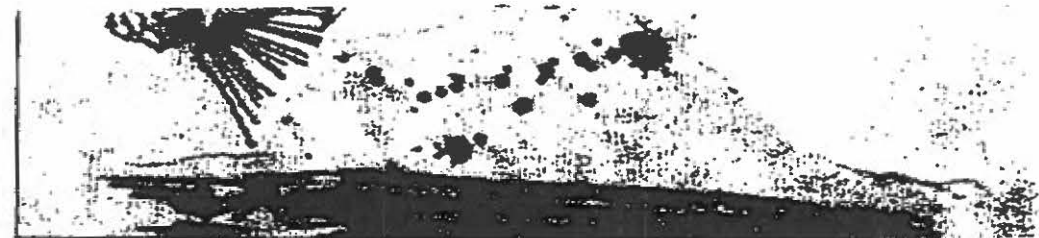
The U.S. Navy followed up in May 1994 by returning to the state the island of Kahoolawe, which had been commandeered during World War II for use as a bombing and target range.

Congress has authorized \$400 million to clean up and restore the deserted island, smallest of the eight main islands in the Hawaiian chain.

"The apology is an admission that the United States stole Hawaii," says Francis A. Boyle of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, an international law expert who is advising some native Hawaiians.

"The Hawaiians have a right under international law to restore the independent nation they had in 1893 when the U.S. government came and destroyed it," he says. "This is their right, if that's what they want to do." The recent federal and state actions have given the sovereignty movement "more momentum and legitimacy than ever," Boyle says.

But what form sovereignty might take is wide open: an independent Hawaiian na-



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tion, completely separated from the United States; a nation-within-a-nation, similar to some of the American Indian nations on the mainland; a commonwealth like Puerto Rico's; or status quo, but with greater control over native lands.

The legally complicated issue of Hawai-

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ian lands ceded to the United States at annexation and turned over to the state in 1959 is at the heart of the sovereignty matter.

The most aggressive of the half-dozen major sovereignty groups, the Ohana Council,

declared independence from the United States in January 1994, both for its 10,000 members and for all native Hawaiians.

The self-proclaimed Nation of Hawaii, which has its own constitution, scorns the coming vote. A spokesman says the nation "absolutely opposed to the administration's so-called plebiscite by the illegitimate state of Hawaii."

The plebiscite, according to Nation of Hawaii leaders, is "a direct interference with the recognized inherent rights of the people and their process of self-determination, a deliberate attempt to confuse the issue and suppress the rightful process of full restitution and restoration."

U.S. Sen. Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii, says he hopes that "the sovereignty of the Hawaiian people will be restored in my lifetime." He envisions an independent Hawaiian government within the framework of the federal and state jurisdictions.

A unified monarchical government of the Hawaiian Islands was first established in 1810, when King Kamehameha I completed his conquest of all the islands.

Abigail Kawananakoa, great-grandniece of a queen, and her cousins are considered by many to have the strongest claim to the Hawaiian throne today, if the monarchy still existed. Honolulu's Iolani Palace, whose restoration Kawananakoa spearheaded, is the only royal palace on American soil.

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